

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ANKARA 01884 071602Z

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ACTION EUR-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8259

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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AMCONSUL ADANA

AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

AMCONSUL IZMIR

EUCOM

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EO 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MPOL, TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH MILITARY ALERT

1. THE FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTS IN RECENT DAYS HAVE FUELED SPECULATION THAT THE TURKISH MILITARY MIGHT BE CONSIDERING A MOVE IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONTINUING GOVERNMENT CRISIS,NOW IN ITS SIXTH MONTH:

A. DEFMIN ILHAMI SANCAR TOLD NEWSMEN ON MARCH 6 THAT A "STAND-BY" ALERT OF SELECTED TURKISH ARMED FORCES UNITS HAD BEEN INSTITUTED LAST FRIDAY (FEBRUARY 28) IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS OF INTENSIFIED UNREST IN GREECE AND TROOPS MOVEMENTS ON GREEK BASES AND ISLANDS. (COMMENT: DATT HAS CONFIRMED THAT TURKISH MILITARY UNITS IN CERTAIN AREAS WERE PLACED ON A LOW-LEVEL ALERT BEGINNING FEBRUARY 27.)

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 ANKARA 01884 071602Z

B. TWO TURKISH JETS MADE THREE LOW PASSES OVER ISTANBUL

MARCH 6, SETTING OFF A VARIETY OF HIGH-LEVEL EXPLANATIONS AND COMMENTS. DEFMIN SANCAR SAID THE FLIGHTS WERE CONNECTED WITH THE ALERT AND HAD "NOTHING TO DO WITH THE GOVERNMENT QUESTION." AIR FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL ALPKAYA ANNOUNCED THAT THE AIRCRAFT WERE F-5S FROM THE BALIKESIR BASE, WHICH WERE PHOTOGRAPHING THE NEW WAR COLLEGE (HARP AKADEMISI) IN AYAZAGA. (COMMENT: THE TURKS HAVE RF-5 RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT STATIONED IN THE AREA WHICH COULD HAVE PERFORMED SUCH A MISSION.) THE FIRST ARMY AND MARTIAL LAW COMMAND IN ISTANBUL ISSUED AN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE FLIGHTS WERE RELATED TO "CERTAIN PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MISSIONS" ON WHICH INFORMATION COULD NOT RPT NOT HAVE BEEN GIVEN BEFOREHAND, BUT "...THERE IS NO GROUND FOR CONCERN AND ANXIETY." COMMENTING ON THE REPORTED FLIGHTS, PRIMIN IRMAK WAS QUOTED BY DAILY GUNAYDIN AS SAYING: "I HAVE HEARD NO SUCH THING. THANK GOD THE DEMOCRATIC REGIME IS FUNCTIONING VERY WELL."

C. GENERAL SEMIH SANCAR, CHIEF OF THE TURKISH GENERAL STAFF, MET WITH THE THREE FORCE COMMANDERS AND OTHER UNNAMED GENERALS BEFORE HIS ROUTINE WEEKLY MEETING WITH PRESIDENT KORUTURK, MARCH 6.

D. LATER THE SAME DAY PRIMIN IRMAK, TOGETHER WITH DEFMIN ILHAMİ SANCAR AND YOUTH AND SPORTS MINISTER ZEKAI BALOGLU ATTENDED A MEETING AT TGS. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT THE DISCUSSIONS WERE PRIMARLY ABOUT "TECHNICAL QUESTIONS."

2. AS IN PAST ALERTS, THE MOTIVATIONS FOR THIS LATEST "STAND-BY" ALERT AND OTHER MOVES BY THE TURKISH MILITARY ARE UNCLEAR. IT SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS COULD HAVE BEEN INVOLVED:

A. A SIGNALLING TO THE CIVILIAN POLITICIANS THAT THE TURKISH MILITARY IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CONCERNED OVER THE INABILITY OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO RESOLVE THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE APPARENT FAILURE OF PRIMIN IRMAK'S LATEST EFFORTS TO FORM A "NATIONAL COALITION" BASED ON THE MAJOR PARTIES.

B. THE NEED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONARY SECURITY MEASURES
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ANKARA 01884 071602Z

AGAINST POSSIBLE OUTBREAKS OF PUBLIC ORDER IN THE EVENT PRESIDENT KORUTURK RESIGNS OVER THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS, A MOVE WHICH HAS BEEN RUMORED IN THE PRESS BUT DENIED BY CANKAYA.

C. IMPRESSING ON THE LOWER-RANKING OFFICERS (WHO REPORTEDLY ARE DISCONTENTED OVER THE PROLONGED GOVERNMENT CRISIS AND THE PROSPECT THAT JUSTICE PARTY LEADER SULEYMAN DEMIREL MIGHT BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO FORM A "NATIONAL FRONT" GOVERNMENT)

THAT THE GENERAL OFFICERS ARE STILL IN CONTROL OF THE TURKISH ARMED FORCES, AND THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO MAKE A MOVE.

D. REACTION TO TURKISH INTELLIGENCE REPORTS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN GREECE, AS DEFMIN STATED.

3. COMMENT: THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO THESE EVENTS IN THE PRESS HAS SERVED TO INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF THE MILITARY AT A TIME WHEN THE LATEST EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS BY THE CIVILIAN POLITICAL LEADERS APPEAR TO BE UNSUCCESSFUL. SIMILAR INCIDENTS PRECEDING THE "COUP BY MEMORANDUM" OF MARCH 12, 1971, INCLUDING THE CALLING OF LOW-LEVEL ALERTS, FREQUENT MEETINGS OF THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND OVERFLIGHTS OF TURKISH CITIES, WERE AMONG THE EARLY INDICATIONS OF THE MILITARY'S CONCERN. AN INDEPENDENT, CONSERVATIVE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT TOLD US MARCH 7 THAT THE NEXT 10-15 DAYS WOULD BE A "CRITICAL PERIOD" DURING WHICH THE MILITARY MIGHT INTERVENE TO RESOLVE THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS. BY CONTRAST, THE PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT TOLD US MARCH 7 THAT WE COULD EXPECT THE PRESIDENT TO CONTINUE WORKING FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOLUTION OF THE GOVERNMENT CRISIS -- "WHICH COULD TAKE MUCH MORE TIME" -- AND TGS CHIEF SANCAR TO CONTINUE PREVENTING MILITARY INTERVENTION. AT ALL EVENTS, THE LATEST MOVES HAVE NOT RPT NOT BEEN OVERTLY DIRECTED AGAINST THE INDIVIDUALS WHO COULD HAVE SOME INFLUENCE ON THE CRISIS, AND IT IS LIKELY THAT MORE AND STRONGER SIGNALS, GRADUALLY ESCALATING, WOULD BE GIVEN BEFORE THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP BECAME MORE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL SITUATION. BERGUS

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